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House approves fiscal year 2015 THUD bill

Written by [Mischa Wanek-Libman](#), editor

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The U.S. House of Representatives approved the fiscal year **2015 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development (THUD)** funding bill on a vote of 229-192. The legislation includes funding for the Department of Transportation, the Department of Housing and Urban Development and other related agencies.

In total, the bill reflects an allocation of \$52 billion in discretionary spending – an increase of \$1.2 billion above the fiscal year 2014 enacted level and a decrease of \$7.8 billion below the president's budget request. However, given the reduction in offsets caused by a decline in Federal Housing Administration receipts, the program level within the bill is more accurately \$1.8 billion below the current level.

Several transportation amendments included in the bill were passed including Rep. Karen Bass' (D-California) amendment that allows transit agencies that receive federal funds to prioritize hiring local residents for projects; Rep. Jeff Denham's (R-California) amendment to prohibit any appropriated funds from being used for high-speed rail in the state of California and an amendment from Rep. Pete Sessions (R-Texas) that eliminates funding for the Amtrak's Sunset Limited, which runs from New Orleans, La., to Los Angeles.

Three other amendments, two from Rep. Paul Broun (R-Georgia) and one from Rep. Sessions, that would further limit Amtrak funding were defeated.

The Federal Railroad Administration is funded at \$1.4 billion, a reduction of \$193 million below current levels. Amtrak operations is budgeted at \$340 million, \$850 million is planned for capital grants and, as expected, no money was allocated for high-speed rail.

The bill also continues policy reforms for Amtrak, such as requiring overtime limits on Amtrak employees and prohibiting federal funding for routes where Amtrak offers a discount of 50 percent or more off normal, peak fares.

In addition, rail safety and research programs are funded at \$220.5 million, \$750,000 over the fiscal year 2014 enacted level to fund inspectors and training.

The bill provides for \$10.5 billion for the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) – \$253 million below the fiscal year 2014 enacted level. Transit formula grants are funded at \$8.6 billion, consistent with 2014 and the final year of MAP-21 authorization legislation. This funding is contingent on the enactment of new transportation authorization legislation, as the current authorization expires this year.

FTA's Capital Investment Grants (New Starts) is provided \$1.7 billion of the transit allocation for all current "Full Funding Grant Agreement" transit projects, and full funding for all state and local "Small Starts" projects that will begin in fiscal year 2015.

The bill cuts the seventh round of Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grants by \$500 million, allocating only \$100 million, which is \$1.15-billion below the administration's request. In the first five rounds of the TIGER program the Department of Transportation received 5,200 applications requesting more than \$114 billion for projects.

"This is sensible, balanced bill that prioritizes funding on important transportation programs that will help to boost our economy and improve our quality of life, while also providing housing options to those Americans most in need," House Appropriations Committee Chairman Hal Rogers said. "This is a critically important, fiscally accountable piece of legislation, and I am pleased that the House today gave it our stamp of approval."

The **White House** was not so warm on the bill issuing a "Statement of Administration Policy" on June 9 that read, "The bill fails to make needed investments in our nation's infrastructure...The administration looks forward to working with the Congress on an orderly appropriations process that supports economic growth,

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opportunity, and our national security while avoiding unnecessary fiscal crises that hold the nation's economy back."

A Senate version of the FY 15 THUD Bill was approved by the Senate Committee on Appropriations on June 5 and has been sent to the Senate floor for discussion.

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